



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## FIFTY YEARS OF FREEDOM: CONDITIONS IN THE SEA COAST REGIONS

BY NIELS CHRISTENSEN,

Editor and Proprietor, *The Beaufort Gazette*, Beaufort, S. C.

The story of the Sea Island Negroes in Beaufort County, S. C., is one of peculiar interest. Here to an unusual extent they predominate in numbers, and, in a greater measure than is usual elsewhere, are land owners. Their inherent tendencies have controlled them to a maximum degree.

For the most part, the rural Negro of the South is massed along the alluvial lands of the coasts and the great rivers. As Dr. Carl Kelsey has pointed out in his admirable study *The Negro Farmer*, the tendency is to segregate. It therefore becomes important to determine the rate of the progress of the race where there is the minimum of influence from his white neighbors.

The progress of any people will be greatest by those groups which are in closest contact with civilizing influences. Industrial conditions and the influence of the white race are perhaps the strongest forces molding the Negro. On the rich land of the sea coast region, and on the alluvial lands of the rivers, industrial conditions are favorable in that there is no limit to the progress the individual farmer can make, no one to say him nay, a world-wide market, a congenial occupation. But here there is little contact with the white. Where, as a tenant farmer of the white land-owner, or as a customer of the white store-keeper, he has the urging of his taskmaster behind him, or as an independent farmer and land owner, he has the example of a white neighbor, the Negro responds. Where he is left to himself he drags.

The extent of his progress under the last named conditions, this article will in a measure set forth in a study of local conditions in one county, from which general tendencies may be deduced.

## CHARACTER OF THE POPULATION

In 1860 old Beaufort District had a population of 6,715 whites and 33,339 blacks. In 1870 Hampton and Beaufort Counties were formed from Beaufort District. The last census for these two counties shows 12,969 whites and 42,496 Negroes. While the whites have gained 93 per cent, the increase of the Negroes has been 27½ per cent.

In 1910 there were only eight counties in the country with a larger proportion of Negroes than Beaufort County, the percentage being 86.9 per cent Negro and 13.1 per cent white. Ten years ago it was 90½ per cent black. The last census shows that the Negroes have decreased 18 per cent since 1900 in Beaufort County, the sea coast half of the territory of Beaufort District, while the whites have increased 18.3 per cent.

This Negro population of 26,376 includes only 1,230 mulattoes, or 4.6 per cent as against 16 per cent for the state at large, and 20.9 per cent for the country.

The total population of the county (30,167) is distributed over its 920 square miles at an average of 33 to the mile.

Summarizing, we might say that in this rather thinly settled district, largely occupied by pure blooded Negroes, the race is diminishing by reason of emigration to the cities and the saw mills and turpentine camps, where there is a demand for unskilled labor.

## MORALITY

*Criminal records*

An examination of the records of the criminal courts cannot go back of 1879 as the dockets before that date are missing. I have therefore, compared the records for the years 1879, 1880 and 1881 with those of 1910, 1911 and 1912. The first records do not designate white and black law-breakers and the figures are totals. However, a careful examination of the names indicates very few, if any, whites brought to trial. The records for the latter period are for Negroes only. There were only four or five whites tried during this last period. The total number of cases brought to trial and the total convictions for the two periods are given. The first period shows 164 cases, and 61 convictions, and the latter shows 65 cases and 49 convictions.

In the first instance only 37.2 per cent of those tried were convicted, and in the second 75.3 per cent. This condition may be accounted for by the fact that in the earlier period the county machinery was largely in the hands of Negroes, and the percentage of Negroes on the juries was considerable. White juries are not so lenient.

The record may be classified as follows:

	1879-1881	1910-1912
Crimes against the person.....	62	27
Crimes against property.....	78	31
Other crimes.....	24	7
Total.....	164	65

Of the 62 cases, 11 were for murder, 13 for assault and battery, 17 assault with intent to kill, 12 riot and assault, 8 assault with intent to rape. The latter two crimes do not appear at all among the cases of 1910-1912. The intent to rape were committed against their own race, while the riots were disturbances among church congregations. There has been no attempt by a Negro to commit rape upon a white woman, except in one instance where both parties were non-residents and in the county for only a few hours at a railroad junction.

Of the 78 cases, 18 were for grand larceny, 24 for petit larceny, 21 for house-breaking, 6 for trespass, 5 for breach of trust.

In a population of more than 26,000 Negroes only one quarter of 1 per cent are indicted each year in the circuit court.

Most of the crimes of violence may be traced to whiskey as an aggravating factor.

### *The Church Records*

The amount of support given his church may not be a certain indication of the Negro's advance in morality, but it certainly is worth consideration.

Freedom found him with a considerable church membership, and he fell heir to some church property which had belonged to his masters. But the records which show the financial condition of the several congregations for this county indicate pretty accurately his accumulations since slavery.

In the "low country" the Baptist church has the largest following. The Methodist comes next in importance, and there are enough Presbyterians in the town of Beaufort to own a church. Of other denominations there is little heard among the Negroes here.

From the church organizations of Beaufort County statements have been secured for the purpose of this review and compilation made. This recapitulation is not accurate, but is approximately correct.

We find 68 churches, with 10,339 members, cared for by 38 pastors. The church property is valued at \$91,625 and the annual funds collected for all church purposes are \$17,967.19.

The average, then, would be a church of 152 members served by a pastor giving a little over half his time to this particular charge. The property would be worth \$1,494 and the annual contribution \$264.

Viewing it from another angle, we see that there is a church member for every 2.55 of the total Negro population of 26,376, and that the annual subscription amounts to 68 cents for each one of the said total population of the county.

Reviewing these figures it may be concluded that the percentage of criminals is small and diminishing, and that the church is well supported. It may be added that the leading ministers are usually men of force, character and education and that the influence of the church is far greater than that of the public school. The minister is the natural leader. The standard of sexual morality in the rural districts is low, and while drunkenness is not at all common, the "county dispensaries" sell annually \$150,000 worth of whiskey, most of which is bought by Negroes.

#### LITERACY

The school attendance for the Negro for Beaufort County between the ages of six and fourteen is 49.4 per cent, as against 56 per cent for South Carolina and 59.7 per cent for the country at large.

Of the race ten years of age and over in this county, 43 per cent are illiterate, with which we may compare 38.7 per cent for the state and 30.4 per cent for the country. But the rate of decrease in illiteracy in Beaufort County between 1900 and 1910 was 29.68

per cent, while that for the country was 31.6 per cent and for the state 26.7 per cent.

This county has an unusually large revenue for school purposes, derived in considerable measure from profits of the liquor business which it manages as a monopoly. The amount of expenditure per black pupil is \$3.08 per annum as against \$1.98 for the state at large; the average salary per colored teacher is \$148.96, and for the state \$113.72. The county school session is 16.1 weeks, and the state's 13.8. Moreover there are now three private schools maintained principally by Northern contributors, and in the past decades there were more. In the county there are on an average, 56 pupils to each teacher, and 64 in the state. The average number of pupils in each school is 56, and in the state 64. The excess in number of illiterates, therefore, is not due to lack of opportunity.

Need of the stimulus of white example shows itself particularly in the conditions as to illiteracy. With greater educational opportunities the coast Negroes have accomplished less in fifty years than their race in the up-state counties, though the response in the last decade has been marked, and greater than in the state at large.

#### INDUSTRY

The economic advance of the Negro during his fifty years of freedom may be best determined by discovering what he possesses today. It would be difficult to fix, even approximately, the value of his annual earnings in this one county. He came out of freedom without property and with this as a starting point we may discover certain facts.

An attempt has been made, however, to compare the cotton crop of 1860 with that of the present day in this section, but without very satisfactory results as to accuracy. The census shows that where the old Beaufort District raised 190.95 pounds per inhabitant, the same territory in the last four years raised an average of 260.47 pounds. In Beaufort County, where a large part of the crop is raised by Negroes, the crop for the last named period averaged 162 pounds.

It is generally held among the merchants who "carry" these Negro farmers that they are not maintaining the grade of their long staple cotton nor making as large yields as formerly. This may in

part be attributed to the fact that the prices for the staple have not increased in proportion to the cost of living. The stagnation in the market of their principal crop results in the dwindling population noted.

The falling off in cotton raising is also attributed to the fast disappearing number of slavery-trained Negroes. No universal industrial training has been substituted for the new generation. The industrial schools are not numerous enough to have marked effect on large areas, and only in the past decade have they been industrial in more than name.

A cash-paying Negro farmer is an exception. Twelve months' credit is the rule, and a natural result of a one-crop system.

#### TAX BOOK FIGURES

A study of the present property holdings of the Negroes in the four blackest townships of the county may be interesting. They have a population of 21,910, including the 3,000 credited to the towns of Port Royal and Beaufort. Outside of these towns the white population is negligible; in one township with over 7,000 Negroes, there are not 100 whites. The figures for real and personal property are taken from the books of the county auditor. As whites and blacks are not designated on these records, it was necessary to secure the assistance of the present auditor and of one who served

#### FOUR TOWNSHIPS

	1876			1912		
	White	Negro	Total	White	Negro	Total
No. of taxpayers.....	341	2,937	3,278	662	7,024	7,686
No. of buildings.....	501	406	907	1,116	2,663	3,779
No. of acres.....	98,369½	62,195½	160,565	134,384	50,913	185,297
No. of town lots.....	129	367	496	1,573	885	2,458
Average acre per taxpayer.....	288.4	25.9	.....	200	7	.....
Value personalty.....	\$237,609	\$250,402	\$488,011	\$407,590	\$274,735	\$682,125
Value realty.....	\$608,120	\$361,253	\$969,373	\$948,250	\$643,400	\$1,591,650
Total value.....	\$845,729	\$611,655	\$1,457,384	\$1,355,840	\$918,135	\$2,273,775

many years ago. These gentlemen indicated the white tax payers on the books and on this data the following study is based. The statement of the bank holdings is estimated by the bank authorities, and the church property is given from figures supplied by the church organizations before referred to.

The figures for 1876 and 1912 were taken to show the relative progress.

In the late sixties between 20,000 and 25,000 acres were sold to the Negroes of two of these townships for a nominal price by the federal direct tax commissioners. The latter acquisitions have been on the open market.

1. Previous to 1876 the county and state governments were in the hands of Negroes and exploiters and were much demoralized. In the years since, the acres returned in the given townships have been steadily increased.

2. Thirty-six years ago the Negro holdings were in the hands of heads of families that have since been divided among heirs. Hence the decrease in the size of per capita holdings.

3. The realty is returned for assessment at about one-third its value and the personalty at about 60 per cent.

It will be seen that though the number of buildings returned by the blacks has increased over sixfold, and though more than double the number of individuals are paying taxes on an assessed value 50 per cent greater than in 1876, yet the land returned has diminished. Over 11,000 acres have slipped away in thirty-six years. At the same time they have increased their ownership of town lots from 367 to 885.

#### PRESENT HOLDINGS

Realty (market value).....	\$1,930,200
Personalty (market value).....	384,629
Savings in banks .....	40,000
Church property.....	83,125

Total.....	\$2,437,954
------------	-------------

The per capita worth of each Negro enumerated in these townships in the last census, would be over \$120.

It is significant that of the total realty and personalty (\$2,314,-829), more than one half, or \$1,434,321.80, was secured in the first ten years of freedom.



## PERSONAL APPEARANCE

The steady improvement in dress and hygiene is noticeable. In this part of the South where the dividing line between the races in matters social and political is strongly marked, there is little friction. The Negro brought from slavery a genuine deference to the white race, that showed itself in "good manners." Today much of this spirit remains.

## THE FUTURE

The inertia of the race where left to itself, impresses those who live among them and study the progress of this people. It is often remarked that the sea food of the coast makes existence too simple a matter. The temptation is to "live in the creek," where the fish, crab, oyster and terrapin afford an abundance of food supply and the source of a small money revenue. But little fuel or clothing is necessary. The climate affects all with lassitude. Why toil and slave where airs are balmy, skies clear, all nature languorous, and man's necessities few? What does "freedom" mean if not emancipation from arduous labor? One sometimes wonders that there is any advance.

Yet there is progress. The story of the development of truck farming is one of patient industry rewarded now by large returns. Around Norfolk, Charleston and at several points in Florida the success of market gardeners has been one of the significant industrial developments of the coast region for the half century. In Beaufort County capital has been accumulated, icing, transportation, and other marketing facilities built up, and lands developed to the point where the truck crop is as important as the cotton crop. Farmers have netted over \$1,000 an acre for lettuce, and this season one potato grower has twenty times that amount as the profit of his whole crop. The advanced methods, with accompanying improved machinery, introduced by these men, most of them natives, are making over agricultural conditions.

As yet the Negro's part in this new agricultural life is principally that of the day laborer. A considerable number are raising truck successfully in a small way, but it takes capital, intelligence, and experience to succeed, and no great increase in the number of Negro truck farmers are looked for in the immediate future. Mean-

while he is learning the value of intensive farming which the rice and cotton fields of the great plantations did not teach him.

The enterprise with which this new agricultural life is infusing the coast regions is felt in all occupations, and, as skilled artisan and day laborer, the Negro is part of most of them. His industrial life is inextricably bound up with the industrial life of this territory where he is so large a part of the population. Every movement affects him.

No man can foresee the direction agricultural development here will take. Once indigo was raised and exported from this town in locally built ships, rice came, and by improving the grade the name of Carolina was made known around the world. A fine fiber of cotton established the reputation of the Sea Islands in every factory where the best cotton goods are made. Today indigo has disappeared, rice has all but gone, the long staple cotton business is not thriving, but the wealth of the great eastern cities is paying our farmers fancy prices for lettuce in winter, potatoes in the spring and other vegetables out of their seasons.

Other unforeseen economic conditions may come to leaven the mass. Phosphate mining played a part here for two decades and then passed on to Florida and other sections, and the oyster canneries of this and the gulf coast now employ Negro gatherers and shuckers. Climatic and other conditions make these Sea Islands an ideal winter recreation ground for the nation, and the future will doubtless see them so used. Plan as we may, theorize with ever so much seeming wisdom, in the fulness of time some great economic change comes, sweeping all before it, forming new barriers, destroying old ones, cutting new channels. But in all human probability the possibilities of the years to come lie in agriculture, and with more white farmers to lead in the development of these lands, the coast regions will advance with rapid strides.

It is probable that long before the vast uncultivated areas of the South have become occupied, the Negro will have firmly established himself in all the black districts, as he has here, as a land owning farmer. Surrounded by an ambitious, progressive and enlightened people, his rate of progress will be accelerated.